

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Maplewood Man Sentenced to 18 Months in Prison for Money
Laundering; Case Stems from “Operation Bid Rig” Corruption Probe

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NEWARK – A former employee of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority was sentenced today to 18 months in federal prison for conspiracy to commit money laundering, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr. announced.

U.S. District Judge Anne E. Thompson also ordered Leroy Robinson, 53, of Maplewood, to pay a fine of \$5,000 (As part of his plea agreement, Robinson also forfeited \$12,000 to the government). Judge Thompson continued Robinson's release on a \$150,000 secured bond pending his surrender to authorities with the U.S. Bureau of Prisons on Sept. 1.

On Dec. 2, 2008, Robinson pleaded guilty before Judge Thompson to one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering for conspiring with Joseph Merla to conduct financial transactions involving the proceeds of unlawful activity, namely loansharking, with the intent to conceal and disguise the nature of those transactions.

During the plea hearing, Robinson admitted providing five checks totaling \$108,000 between April 2004 and February 2005 to three individuals in exchange for \$120,000 in cash, which he believed represented loansharking proceeds. Robinson admitted that he had believed that the individuals from whom he had accepted the cash were involved in the contracting business but also ran a profitable loansharking operation. In reality, these individuals were a cooperating witness and two undercover FBI agents, according to Mark J. McCarren, the Assistant U.S. Attorney who handled the prosecution.

Robinson's sentencing represents the most recent development from Operation Bid Rig, the same investigation which has led to charges against more than 20 officials in Monmouth, Ocean and Somerset Counties, including convictions of the former mayors of Asbury Park, Ocean Township, West Long Branch, Brick Township, Hazlet and Keyport.

In determining the actual sentence, Judge Thompson consulted the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, a defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system and thus defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all the time imposed by the court.

Marra credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, with the investigation.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney McCarren.

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Defense Counsel: Walter Timpone, Esq., of Morristown